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TOWARDS A NON-FACEBOOK

MASHINES BLOCKCHAIN, CONNECTIVITY, FEATURED, INTERNET, NON-FACEBOOK, NON-MEDIA, TECHNOLOGY

The current Facebook debate is a chance to get your act together and get organized – just a little.

What does it mean to get dis-, re-, co-organized, to the worse, or the better? A further balkanisation, a migration to the cryptoanarchist waste of resources, blockchain-nations as a refresh of the independent cyberspace myth, or the various academic art conferences giving a place for certain representative counter movements in order to map and neutralize them. The culture war is probably a trap allowing single career paths instead of lifting up the standards on a larger scale. This counts especially for the branch of critical media art, which has buffered away criticality from the rest of the art world for too long. While often fruitful and interesting on the lower layers, it gets thinner and weaker the higher you get. The neoliberal call for self-diversification is a part of a parapolitical neutralisation effort to keep away resistant forces from where they could do real harm and lead to systemic change.

Synchronize and Change Facebook from Within

It is understandable, leaving Facebook because it is dull, depressing, boring – but the same counts for your workplace probably, the compromise you had to make to rent an affordable flat, the places you need to go shopping or studying. Even if there are alternatives in the physical, urban world, the ecosystem of myriads of websites, linux distros, apps you never have seen, and tracks you never will listen to, is part of the long tail myth of consumerist choice. Culturally, the unification under one media platform, such as the book, or the internet, has been revolutionary in terms of "consciousness building". Today you are told that somewhere else, with a different type of media speech will be authentic and free again, just to stop you from waking up and stating the obvious.

The existence of pluralism and diversity depends on the conditions of the surrounding it derives from. The current platformisation is adding new application layers on top of the web. One can dream and fight for a niche in between, or fight for the change and opening of these platforms in terms of democratic design principles. Both approaches have pros and cons. Since we have no better political system architectures available, we could stick with embedded democracy and discuss the specifications, when looking at the complete lack of these features in today's online infrastructure.

Democratisation or Exodus as Hegemonial Choice

To run away from Facebook headlessly and to leave it before being censored, kicked out or shut off, is ill advised from a radical democratic point of view. Maybe it would be possible, in a gramscian way, to doubt the absolutistic public sphere that Facebook has erected. But going along back to the alternatives, such as to the municipal level of creative, digital and global cities, or to the balkanisation of cryptoanarchist blockchain based currencies, or to the ghost towns of abandoned homepages in the dark net, or to countless masculinist linux projects which reinvented the wheel, as well as to various counter-platforms that clone and modify the UX of Facebook in one or the other way, it turns out, that they have been proven as dead-end devolutions. Compared to the mass consumerist time waste of Facebook, they are still interesting tactical forms of excess. Due to their false promise of offering a strategy and not just an individualist tactical sidestep, these outside positions are certainly not inherently better ones. Neither they are inherently bad -they're just no solution. And they are certainly not politically or theoretically smarter than trying to change Facebook on Facebook.

From a media theoretical point of view it seems blind to #deletefacebook, since the deletion confirms, that Facebook reduces you to an effect of the medium. You can accept tacitly not to be able to change the channel from within the channel, being in it debating it, critiquing it, protesting against it or subverting it, or taking any distanced meta position from within the medium. From a political point of view, the spectrum of protest forms includes to exercise the right to delete yourself (#loeschdich), and there are various existing channels to discuss strategic common goals in the aftermath of the CA scandal. Not to confuse the means of change with the goal itself, we need to achieve more rights, more, or at least some, democratic freedom, to transform this powerful platform in an exemplary way. Instead of dispersing the platform into micropolitical niches which ultimately risks to neutralize its potentials, we could form new brilliant alliances of productive alienations.

Remain Strategy

By taking a virtual outside position, that can be e.g. excentric, external, artistic or theoretical, one cannot neglect, that even the most underprivileged and precarious existence will be impossible outside of today's capitalist realism. Trying to escape the network effects of Facebook in an exemplary way will only be a symbolic move of self-alienation and 'dark' independency. Leaving Facebook weakens the resistance against the platform on this platform. As a representative function of the powerlessness and passivity in society, flirting with the exodus, a hipsterist escapism or cocooning into the digital diaspora will never make oneself less vulnerable, or free, without forming collective agencies of real resistance: running archives, sharing strange interests and hobbies, collecting and filtering what has been easily neglected or forgotten. We seek strategic alternatives for a planetary order, branching points and possible future forks. Of course they can be developed on or off the platform. But as an individual strategy, better don't fool yourself believing that there's a safe zone of a pirate utopia reserved for you in cyberspace.

Across the stack

Lets face the facts. Facebook is providing an application layer on top of the web. It has a horizontal monopoly position when it comes to web usage, as well as in the messenger and mobile social media space. To propose free alternative solutions is politically and technically ill advised. Alternatives that are based on a free and open clone approach are rather doomed, due to the network effects. Diaspora, ello, vero and various comparable approaches tried to operate next to Facebook, but there is not even a niche left for them. You need to expand to specialized social networks such as linkedin for CVs and job related stuff, and academia-edu or soundcloud etc. to pick up the crumbs. In terms of surveillance features and data vampirism the business models of these alternative platforms are rarely better than the one of Facebook. To tap into new network effects, either one is able to vertically go down the stack to expand into physical appliances (smart home) and/or protocols (p2p), or is able to go up the stack (ai driven agents). With a new abstraction layer which will lead to the neutralisation of Facebook in terms of an open api as an opened infrastructure, a democratized Facebook can serve as a backend. Like in Tim Berners-Lee solid project, for autonomous bots and scrapers, as a social media layer to build new stuff on top. Lately even Google has given up to build a competitor for instant messaging (to Facebooks quasi monopoly) going down and sideways in the mobile stack to use SMS and no-internet messaging as a base for a new app.

Interoperabilities, Design Change and Open Data Sheets

Even if the regulation will achieve some opening of the api's, interoperability will not be able to replicate the complexities of one system onto the other without a more radical approach. Interoperability as the lowest common denominator of regulatory efforts represents the misunderstanding of today's infrastructures by the "other" culture, using railway or telephony metaphors. Only in combination with a true open architecture that provides open source, open data and open datasheets, forks will be possible, as well as federated spin-offs. Unfortunately it is precisely the api-based third party eco-system which will get restricted after the CA case. Interoperability as a means of capitalist appeasement is used in industries such as the military industry, to have heterogenically existing systems work together. In computer hardware, such as the PC, the interoperability is achieved by open standards. In software architecture it is called legacy and a migration or a replacement is often easier to achieve. The same counts for the keyword "algorithm". Algorithms do not make much sense without data structures.

The way our data, attention, and labor online is defined is much more presented in the specifications of data sets, the modelling of input-output relations, and not merely visible in the implementations of running code, e.g. the algorithms. by demanding

access to the documentation of the design process, the iterative, agile but nevertheless non-democratic development cycles within social media companies become debatable. The strategies, and use case modelling will be much more revealing than merely fetishizing the code itself, countering the assumed power, with a fetishisation of jurisdiction. Both law and code are not the most effective levels of corporate control. In order to change the companies one must try to understand their organisational models, their design process and decision structure first.

Demanding transparency for algorithms alone, just presents the limitations of digital literacy today. 30 years after the internet has been introduced and 70 years after the computer has been invented. So, instead of talking about acceleration one must talk about education. Besides the documentation of a systems architecture and of its specifications and source code, as well as a full documentation of its "datasheets", the metadata describing the data structures are necessary demands. Without them the interoperability as well as a regulatory approach to algorithms are ill fated forms of cross-cultural intermediation, which rather establish bodies of agency, that are open to lobbyism and obstruction of all kinds.

Embedded Democracy

Facebook combines as well a few known design patterns, such as "portal", the good old "collaborative filtering", as we called it in the old nettime footer, as it is taking thread based use cases that are known from usenet and compuserve to provide the annotated web that has been promised in the 90ies. The problem behind the current privacy debacle is the property issue: 'no commercial use without permission' is as problematic as the complete lack of democratic functionality within the platform. A de-individualisation of social media, as Benjamin Bratton has proposed, would be accompanied with new options to reset the priorities.

An individualist liberal movement comes with tactical sidesteps and prefers issues of smaller group identification before larger common goals. It is not that the bias of algorithms is not a problem, but it is embedded into a larger analysis of power including the data structures, the system architecture, flaws in laws and regulation, exploitative business models and various forms of discriminatory bias in the engineering process, often due to a lack of governance in terms of transparency and accountability. On the other hand, a new universalism even if proposed by Facebook serves as a plane on which today earth problems need to be understood and solved globally. The equality it offers and a certain degree of neutrality of the interface layers are a cultural potential to build on, to change from within, modify and fork, and politicise against. Dreaming about building your own little world on the side is fruitless if it is not connected to a larger political fight of changing the architecture of power and property mediated by the internet. Nevertheless, tacit forms of protest, as isolatory, anti-productive or escapist they might appear, should not be condemned. As the change of these platforms is a long term goal which can be fought for on and off these platforms in various ways.

Facepedia

A more object oriented social network is possible, where subjects group around issues, goals, projects, events and the individual is not just the ultimate product in the center of the social graph any more. A combination of models known from Wikipedia and Mozilla, non profit coops with more democratic functionality in iterative design cycles, such as bug trackers, eternal logs, transparency of documentation. Democratic design principles known since a long time need to be formulated, discussed and implemented. The discourse of regulatory law as well as ethical commissions will not prevent the next levels of alienation, surveillance and oppression that are coming with machine learning and big data driven AI. The economic inequality and the property relation should be the first common issue beyond all minority based struggles, to connect various fights and not obey to the framings and neutralising offers of liberalism.

Recently it has been calm around a defense of the commons. The liberalisation of open data has led to a pipeline of structured data, going directly from the foundations of Wikipedia to google graph and deep mind. Wikidata, a project funded by google, is not combined with a new license which would compensate for the billions of dollars worth of human labour. These are now used to train AI, and structure and enhance search results. The social factory of Facebook, as well as Amazon, Google, and any other larger commercial online platforms will turn to a model of commodifying and monetizing data by feeding it value extraction methods that are run by machine learning algorithms. The underlying proprietization of data is the central strategic point to attack.

The french AI proposal is a great chance for a defense of open data, not just along the values of Diderot and Alembert. All training data for machine learning should be put under a new kind of data-GPL-license which is free for non-commercial or scientific use. But forces companies which make profit to re-compensate the commons, probably using blockchain methods, and become accountable in terms of reproducible trainings that are lacking methods of debugging and controlling AI.

Press Pause, Get Organized and Strike!

It has been a few years ago now, that Tiziana Terranova has proposed the red stack. Burak Arikan has proposed a formalisation of unpaid online labour. Tomaso Tozzi has proposed the netstrike in 1995. Richard Barbrook and me have written a manifesto for the digital artisan. There are plenty of people who are concerned and interested in possible and exemplary changes of Facebook here and now. Theoreticians, activists, journalists, artists ... Until now there is hardly a place where they join, filter and exchange relevant texts and get self-organized a little more.

A strike or #facebreak might be still a valid form of protest, of demanding forms of governance on facebook and as a manifestation of not wanting to be governed in such a way. As proposed above, I will suspend my account from 25th of may to 1st of june 2018.

In the meantime let's work on a list of demands, as in democratic design changes, to facebook and other platforms.

Lets call it #non-facebook.

<https://www.facebook.com/groups/217513475509054/>

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META

CONTACT

FORCE-INC/MILLE PLATEAUX

IMPRESSUM

DATENSCHUTZERKLÄRUNG

TAXONOMY

CATEGORIES

TAGS

AUTHORS

ALL INPUT

SOCIAL

FACEBOOK

INSTAGRAM

TWITTER